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A

HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITARIAN CHURCH

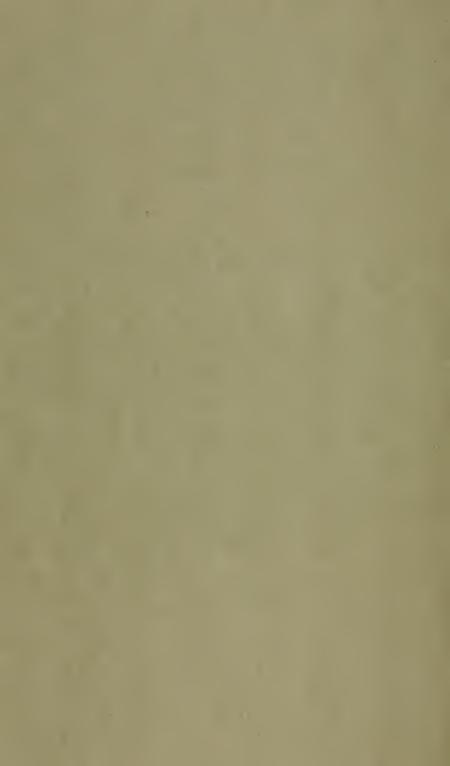
OF

VINELAND, NEW JERSEY.
WITH A LIST OF MEMBERS

PRIVATELY PRINTED

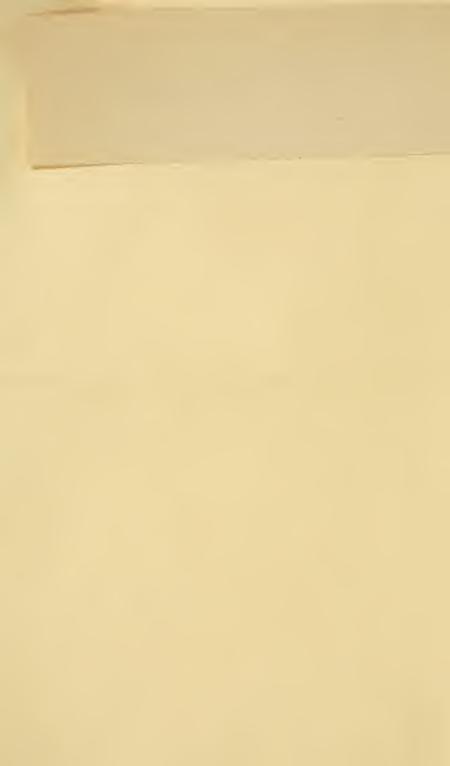
VINELAND, NEW JERSEY

1919



WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF

FRANK D. ANDREWS.



A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL UNITARIAN CHURCH

OF

VINELAND, NEW JERSEY.
WITH A LIST OF MEMBERS

COMPILED BY
FRANK D. ANDREWS

PRIVATELY PRINTED

SIXTY-SIX COPIES ONLY

NO. I.

VINELAND, NEW JERSEY

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PREFACE.

Fifty-eight years ago the place where Vineland now stands was a wilderness. Through this uninviting tract was the recently constructed railroad connecting it with the outside world and making possible its development.

Here, on the eighth of August 1861, the first blow was struck toward clearing the land and making it a fit abode for man,

Some four years later, such had been the growth of the settlement, preparations were made for the establishment of a liberal church. So successful was the movement that a society was formed and a church of the liberal faith erected where but a few years before man was seldom seen.

Through many vicissitudes and amid the changing population the church has been sustained and today stands as a mountment to its founders and their descendants.

The story of its half century and more of growth is here briefly told, prepared in part for the fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the church, with subsequent additions.

The writer was an occasional attendant at the church during Rev. Oscar Clute's pastorite, and for upward of forty-five years has been identified with the society.

Through his association with the pastors and people of the church he has been able to follow the changes that have occurred during that period,

and observe the effect upon their lives, and is convinced the principles of the Unitarian faith preached from the pulpit of this church have been most helpful in the formation of character; that, as he recalls the names of some who found homes elsewhere, is assured they carried with them the gospel of love to God and service to man, inspiring others with higher ideals, so that, in this and other communities the Unitarian Church of Vineland has been a power for good.

FRANK D. ANDREWS.

Vineland, New Jersey.

The establishment of a church of the Unitarian faith in Vineland was largely due to the New England settlers, who coming here when the place was new, found among the organized religious societies, none embodying the liberal christian thought with which they were familiar; and desirous of worshiping according to the dictates of their conscience, took steps to form a society whose object was, "To cultivate a Christian spirit in its members, and all others over whom it can have influence; to teach pure religion, and to promote that practical Christianity which manifests itself by pure lives, and by hearty cooperation in good works." In response to a call the following gentlemen met at the residence of William H. Earle, November 26, 1865, viz: L. Richardson, C. L. Richardson, M. B. Felton, D. P. Hutchins and R. F. Ball. At this meeting a committee consisting of Messrs. Felton, Hutchings and Richardson was appointed to confer with Charles K. Landis, the founder of Vineland, who for the advancement of the religious interest as well as for the prosperity of the place had donated building lots for the various churches. This committee was also delegated to procure a hall for holding public meetings. Mr. Earle was to correspond with friends in the East, in regard to a minister to do missionary work in Vineland The committee secured the use of the Academy on Landis Avenue, now forming part of the Grove House, and a preliminary meeting was held on December 10, to which all persons in

favor of organizing a new Religious Society "that shall avoid the extremes of Conservatism and Liberalism in endeavoring to promote practical Christianity are cordially invited to be present." At this meeting Messrs. Felton, Ball and Richardson were chosen a committee to draft a constitution for the Society. The committee reported on the 18th and a constitution was adopted which remained in force until May 4, 1869, when it was amended.

Among the fundamental principles were the following: "True religion consists in love to God and love to man, in being good and doing good" "There are truly religious persons in every denomination. There are persons just as religious outside of all denominations." "The test of a man's religion is not the creed that he professes, nor the church he attends, but his own character, purposes, and aims. If these are good it is evident that he has within him that living faith which manifests itself in good works"

The first board of officers chosen were; M. B. Felton, Secretary; William H. Earle, Corresponding Secretary; D. P. Hutchins, Treasurer; C. L. Richardson, Collector; Messrs. W. H. Earle, M. M. Boyce and B. F. Ball, Trustess.

On December 31, 1865, a meeting was held in the Academy at 20'clock, when a Sunday-School and Bible-Class was formed with William H. Earle as Superintendent. The school and bible-class continued to hold meetings during the winter and until April 1, 1866, when Mechanics Hall, now Grand Army Hall, over the present Post Office, was completed and rented by the Society.

On Thursday, April 5, the hall was formally opened, Rev. A. P. Putnam, of Brooklyn, N. Y., preaching the first liberal christian sermon ever delivered

in Vineland. On the following Sunday Rev. John Murray of Dorchester, Mass., conducted the first Sunday service. Mr. Murray spoke the three remaing Sundays of the month both morning and evening. One topic he presented at an evening meeting when the attendence was more general, was, "The advantages of Unitarians as compared with Trinitarians, as shown in their view of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit."

Rev. Mr. Fairly addressed the Society July 1st, and Rev. W. M. Fernald of Boston, the 8th, the closing service for the summer. Rev. John Allen of Massachusetts preached at the opening service September 15th. Rev. C. W. Emerson of Brookfield, Vt., supplied the pulpit October 28th and November 5th, and was very much liked Rev. Mr. Galvin spoke the 10th, after which Rev. Mr. Brigham of Vermont, was engaged until April 1st 1867, when Mr. Emerson was expected to return.

The announcement was made January 26, 1867, that a site for a church had been selected on the north-west corner of Sixth and Elmer Streets, and a building would be erected the coming summer.

To raise money for payment on the lot a fair and festival was held February 7th and 8th, when over \$100, was secured.

In June 1867, a call was given Prof. Oscar Clute, who had recently resigned the chair of mathematics in the Michigan State Agricultural College and was then a student at the Meadville Theological School. Mr. Clute accepted and entered upon his duties November 10th. The following month he commenced a series of lectures on the "Unitarian Belief".

On the 20th of February 1868, the new church was dedicated and Mr. Clute ordained.

The church, built of stone from Vineland quaries,

is in size sixty-five by forty one feet, planned and erected under the supervision of D. S. Robinson. In architecture it is of the gothic order, with windows of stained glass. The interior is finished up to the roof showing all the timbers, a gallery extending across the front of the church, the pulpit being in the rear on a raised platform in a recess.

The dedication of the Vineland church was the occasion of the third meeting of the Conference of Unitarian and other Christian Churches of the Middle and Southern States being held here.

The opening meeting of the Conference was held in the new church on the evening of the 19th of February, and continued during the forenoon of the 20th. Delegates were present from a number of Unitarian Churches and the proceedings were of much interest. At the dedicatory service at 2 o'clock the church was packed, aisles, porch and steps, so great was the interest taken by the townspeople.

The exercises opened with a voluntary. Mr. J. P. Walker of Boston, offered prayer, an anthem by the choir was followed by a scripture lesson by Rev. R. P. Stebbins, D. D., of Washington, D. C. An original hymn composed by William H. Earle was then sung, after which Rev. Moses Ballou of Philadelphia, preached the sermon. Rev. W. H. Furness, D. D., of Philadelphia, offered a dedicatory prayer, which was followed by an original hymn written by Mr. Clute, the closing anthem and benediction.

Mr. Ballou's sermon was an able statement of the ground of unity for different religious organizations. "He recognized the different elements, even among Liberal Christians, and regarded them as providential and therefore valuable; and exhorted this Unitarian parish, while it should hold brotherly relations with other societies of Liberal Christians, to present

and adhere to its distinctive faith."

After a social reunion at the house of W. H. Earle, the people again assembled for the evening service filling the church to its utmost capacity.

The order of service was as follows: Voluntary. Introductory sentences and invocation by Rev. A. P. Putnam, of Brooklyn, N. Y., anthem, scripture lesson by Rev. Moses Ballou; original hymn by E. C. Butler of Meadville, Pa., sermon by Rev. W. H. Furness, D. D., of Philadelphia; ordaining prayer by Rev. Rufus P. Stebbins D. D., original hymn by C. C. Edwins of Washington, D. C., charge by Rev. A. P. Putnam; right hand of fellowship by Rev. F, Israel of Wilmington, Del., address to the people, Rev. Charles Lowe of Boston, Mass., anthem and benediction.

The subject of Dr. Furness' sermon was the "Divine in the Human," which he treated "with all the tenderness, delicacy, richness and kindling ardor which characterized the Doctor's pulpit efforts."

The following morning the delegates and visitors returned to their homes, leaving the earnest and faithful band of Christians who composed the Vineland parish—the only Unitarian Society in New Jersey—strengthened and encouraged by their brief presence.

Mr. Clute entered upon the work of church with ability and enthusiasm. In April he began a course of lectures on the distinctive principles of Unitarians. As the spring advanced he devoted much of his spare time to the adornment of the church grounds, which with the help of some of the members became one of the most attractive of the Vineland churches. Among the visitors to Vineland, one at least, Mr. George Scarborough, was led to settle here through the presence of Mr. Clute and a church

of his faith. He erected an elegant mansion on Landis Avenue, which later came into the possession of the New Jersey Training School and was destroyed by fire. Mr. Scarborough became an influential member of the society, and was active in all that pertained to the best interest of the place.

Not only was Mr. Clute devoted to the church, but he entered with zeal into the life of the community; speaking, lecturing and writing, that the cause he espoused should become widely known and respected, if not accepted.

The people who were drawn together in forming the church, were: first, the Unitarians who started the movement; second, Universalists who found no church of their denomination and united with them; third, members or attendants of the so-called orthodox churches who had become dissatisfied with their doctrines, altogether some seventy-five families united in calling the newly erected church their home. The Sunday-School numbered ninety-five scholars with sixteen officers and teachers, the library contained 360 volumes.

While the influx of new settlers to Vineland continued the church prospered, people of liberal faith coming into the society and maintaining it both in numbers and character.

The prosperity that followed the close of the Civil War practically ceased about 1872, and a financial panic ensued. The growth of Vineland almost stopped many leaving the place, and the Society had difficulty in meeting its obligations. Mr. Clute resigned December 18, 1872, and Rev. Moses Ballou was engaged to preach every other Sunday.

The pews, which at first were sold, were voted free at the annual meeting in 1874. Rev. N. E. Boyd was invited to occupy the pulpit during the

illness of Mr. Ballou. He accepted the invitation and remained in Vineland for some months.

The Annual Conference of Unitarian and other Liberal Churches of the Middle and Southern States was again held in Vineland, April 28, and 29, 1874.

At the opening meeting, Rev. J. B. Harrison presided. The Conference was attended by a number of prominent Unitarians, among whom were: Rev. Rush R. Shippen, Rev. Charles G. Ames, Rev. Frederic Hinckley, Rev. F. Israel and others, Revs. Harrison, Ames and Hinckley being the principal speakers.

Rev. J. B. Harrison of Montclair, N. J., preached as a candidate, August 2, 1874, and was so well liked that he was engaged to fill the vacant pulpit.

Preparation were made for the resumption of regular services, October 4th, and a choir, consisting of Messrs. Teal and Cansdell; Misses Hazlet and Ellis, with Miss Turner as organist, was engaged to furnish music.

Mr. Harrison, at that time was in his forty-fifth year. Born in Ohio, he served through the Civil War in the Eighth Indiana Regiment. He had the power of ready extemporaneous speech and when possessed by the spirit, the words seemed to flow in a torrent of eloquence, not mere rapsody, but well chosen and based upon sound discriminating thought. He had a philosophical mind and in his sermons gave unsparingly of the result of his study into the deeper problems of human life. He was a spiritual teacher as well as a preacher, and touched the heart and soul of many of his hearers, inspiring them with hope and trust which bore fruit in personal endeavor.

During his residence in Vineland he wrote a series of articles for the "Independent," then conducted by

Henry W. Wilbur, dealing with the life and thought of the time, which proved most helpful. He also delivered a number of popular lectures each winter.

Mr. Harrison preached his last sermon as pastor, October 28, 1877. He commenced speaking in the hall of the Spring Garden Institute, Philadelphia, Pa., the following Sunday to a small company of liberal people, Though preaching Sundays in the City, he retained his residence in Vineland, and at the request of many of his friends lectured in the church, on week day evening, every other week during part of the winter.

Mr. Harrison's successor was Rev. N. A. Haskell, of Harvard, Mass., who preached on trial in the spring of 1878. He accepted the call that was extended to him and occupied the pulpit for one year, declining a longer engagement.

Rev. Charles H. Tindall of Boston, preached as a candidate in September 1879, and was engaged as pastor of the church in October. Mr. Tindall as a man was generally liked though very conservative. His thought was toward the Episcopal Church, to which denomination he afterwards transfered his allegiance. He remained in Vineland about two years when the church was again without a pastor.

In the spring of 1883, Rev. N. A. Haskell, who had enlisted the aid of the American Unitarian Association in sustaining the church, again took charge. Since his former pastorate he had married, and both he and his wife entered upon the work with vigor and enthusiam. The young girls, were, under Mrs. Haskell's leadership, organized into a society known as the "Gleaners," and did effective work. Teacher's meetings were held, and a society formed for reading the works of Herbert Spencer.

The present pews were put in, taking the place

of chairs formerly used. A considerable sum of money was raised to pay a church debt through Mr. Haskell's efforts. An attempt to establish a Unitarian Church in Camden led to a call, in August 1886, for Mr. Haskell to become its pastor. He accepted the call and commenced his ministry. At first only morning services were held, which left him free to speak in the Vineland church evenings, an arragement that lasted for awhile.

The church was supplied during the interval by Rev. E. M. Wheelock of Mass., Rev. James Shrigley of Philadelphia and others.

On Sunday, March 27, 1887, Rev. William M. Gilbert preached his first sermon in Vineland. Mr. Gilbert had been connected with the Methodist Episcopal Church for upward of twenty years when a change of belief led him into the Unitarian Denomination. He accepted a call to the vacant pulpit and became the pastor of the church April 21, 1887.

Mr. Gilbert entered into the life of the community and became interested in local affairs, serving on the Board of Education as president of that body. He joined the Prohibition Party and labored for the cause. He was the parties candidate for State Senator in 1889, and later was nominated for Congress.

Owing to ill health he tendered his resignation November 26, 1892; his resignation was not accepted at that time however, and he was prevailed upon to continue preaching until the summer vacation.

Mr. Watari Kitashima, a native of Japan, having completed his studies at the Divinity School of Harvard College, came as a candidate for the vacant pulpit and was given a call which was accepted.

While serving the Vineland church he was ordained, May 2, 1894. During his pastorate he was actively engaged in promoting the interest of the

church. He instituted a course of Sunday evening meetings at which statement of belief held by the various denominations were presented, usually by a clergyman of the church, which proved both novel Mr. Kitashima returned to his and interesting. native country, and at the opening of the church in the fall of 1896, Mr. Gilbert, with health somewhat restored, again took up the work he had laid down over two years before. He continued pastor of the church while he lived, failing health in recent years prevented him from engaging in those activities in which he was formerly prominent, although he presided at the meetings of the Historical and Antiquarian Society, of which he was president. preached on the Sunday preceeding his death, which occurred on Saturday, November 25, 1917. Funeral services in the church were largely attended the following Tuesday, Rev. Edmund H. Reeman of Trenton, N. J. preaching the sermon.

The Philadelphia League of Unitarian and other Christian Women have for many years held a meeting in the Vineland church during the month of May. In 1916, the Joseph Priestley Conference met in Vineland May 4, the same date as the League. The morning session was in charge of the ladies, Mrs. Matilda Van Zech reading an interesting paper. The meetings of the Conference were held during the afternoon and evening. Among the speakers from out of town were: Rev. E. H. Reeman, Rev. H. L. Hawes and Dr. Joseph McFarland of Germantown, Rev. J. A. Farley of New York, and Mr. M. T. Garvin of Lancaster, Pa. Rev. E. S. Wiers of Montclair, N. J. and Rev. U. S. B. Pierce of Washington, D. C., were the speakers at the evening meeting.

The church was kept open during the year following the death of Mr. Gilbert, lay services were con-

ducted by members of the society until other arrangements could be made. The pulpit was supplied by Rev. Arthur E. Wood and Rev. Bernard J. Newman, of Philadelphia; Rev. Howard R. Williams of New York, and Rev. F. O. Eggleston of Vineland.

Two candidates applied for the vacant pulpit: Rev. Joseph C. Allen of Brooklyn, Conn., and Mr. Cloyd H. Valentine, a young student from Meadville Theological School, each candidate preaching twice.

At a meeting of the members of the society, held April 30, 1917, to choose a pastor, Mr. Valentine was the successful candidate, his ministry to commence in October.

Services were continued in the church until that time, Rev. Thomas W. Illman of Philadelphia; Rev. Edmund H. Reeman of Trenton; Dr. J.McFarland of Germantown; Ex-Mayor Joseph A. Conwell and Rev. Henry H. Thomas of Vineland; Mrs. Mabel M. Rorer and Mrs. D. Anna Frost of Philadelphia; Mrs. Mary L. Gilbert and others preaching or addressing the congregation.

On graduating at Meadville, Mr. Valentine, with other members of his class was ordained. He was installed pastor of the Vineland Church, Friday evening, October 5, 1917, and entered upon his duties the following Sunday.

The fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the Unitarian Church was commemorated on Sunday February 17, 1918. A history of the church from its organization, with a statement of the fundimental principles adopted, and a brief notice of the pastors during the half century, compiled by Frank D. Andrews, was read. Herbert C. Bartlett presented a paper, "The Unitarian Church as I Have Known It," in which he gave interesting personal remisiscences of the church and pastors from his Sunday School days.

Rev. Cloyd H. Valentine in his closing remarks paid a fitting tribute to the men and women whose lives in the past had been given to the service of the church. The concluding event in the observance of the anniversary was a supper and entertainment by the young people of the church on Wednesday the twentieth.

At the annual meeting of the Society, January 9, 1918, the number of trustees was increased from seven to nine; three serving for one, two, and three years, respectively. The trustees elected at this meeting for one year were: Mrs. G. H. Sinn, Miss Estelle Capen, Miss Helen E. Flood. For two years: Charles E. Temple, S. Webster Hurd, Frank E. Channon. For three years; Mrs. George E Mitchell, Frank D. Andrews, Herbert C. Bartlett.

At the organization of the trustees the following officers were chosen: President, Frank D Andrews. Vice-President, Mrs. George A. Mitchell. Secretary, Frank E. Channon. Treasurer, Herbert C. Bartlett. Collector, Miss Helen E Flood.

During the summer of 1918, Mr. Valentine received an invitation from the Unitarian Society of Canton, Mass., to become their pastor. At the close of his engagement with the Vineland church he removed to his new field of labor.

Rev. Thomas W. Illman of Philadelphia, who had supplied the pulpit several times during the summer of 1917, was invited to become pastor of the church. He accepted the invitation and was prepared to preach the first Sunday in October, but the epidemic of Influenza closed all the churches in Vineland, and it was not until November 3, 1918, that Mr. Illman delivered his first sermon as pastor.

MEMBERS

OF

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